



Washington, D.C. - Rep. Peter Welch testified today before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on legislation he has introduced to give members of the Guard and Reserve equal treatment to a critical post-combat benefits program.

Welch's legislation, H.R. 2259, would allow members of the Guard and Reserve to participate in the highly successful Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) program.

The BDD program allows soldiers to process their claims up to six months prior to discharge so they can begin receiving benefits as soon as they leave the military. Allowing Guard and Reserve- who comprise 40 percent of the forces in Iraq and Afghanistan- to access BDD is intended to help address the claim denial rate which is twice as high for Reserve and Guard veterans.

Vermont's Adj. General Michael Dubie wrote a letter to Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Chairwoman Stephanie Herseth Sandlin in support of extending equal benefits to reservists, which Welch submitted to the committee today.

Dubie wrote, "I strongly support initiatives that help provide better services and benefits for all members of the Reserve Component (RC)... Considering that members of the RC are exposed to the same missions and associated risks while fighting for their country, it is only fair that these same veterans should be treated equally with access to benefits when compared to their active duty counterparts."

Welch said, "It is a simple pact we have made with our troops - and one we are obligated to fulfill: after they have sacrificed to serve our country on the battlefield, we must do all we can to

serve them here at home... My legislation lifts the impediment on Reserve and Guard veterans and allows them to access BDD."

Welch noted before the committee that Vermont has sent about 3,995 soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan since September of 2001 and of that number, 1,976, nearly half, are from the Guard and Reserves.